MY BROTHER STEPHEN

MORRISON FOSTER

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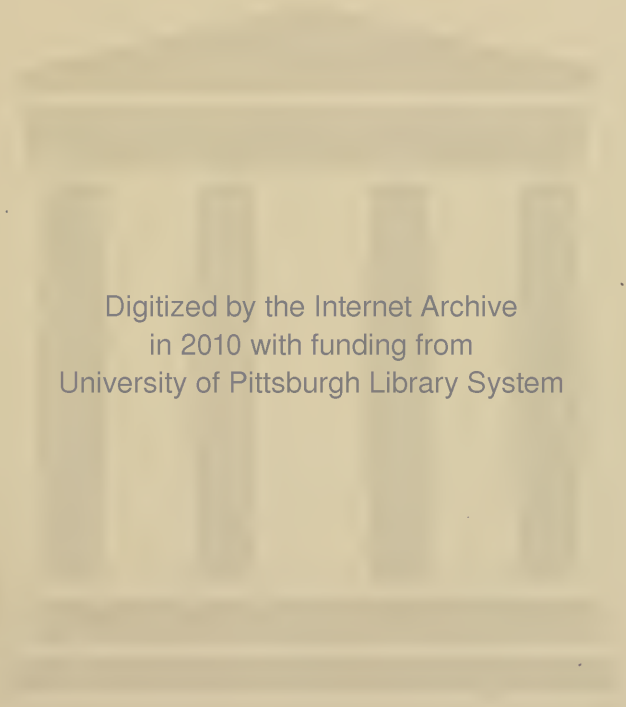
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MY BROTHER STEPHEN

STEPHEN COLLINS FOSTER

Sketch by Joseph Muller from Ambrotype in Foster Hall Collection

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MY BROTHER STEPHEN

BY

MORRISON FOSTER

INDIANAPOLIS

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With the generous approval of Mrs. Evelyn Foster Morneweck and Mr. William B. Foster, daughter and son of Morrison Foster, Foster Hall is presenting this little volume to those interested in securing and disseminating knowledge of the life and work of Stephen Collins Foster.

The world owes much to Morrison Foster. He rescued from possible oblivion many songs and compositions of his brother, accompanied them with this intimate and affectionate story, and did it all into a book in 1896. The edition was limited to two thousand copies that are now rarely found.

Should the presentation of the story in this form win the approval of the audience for which it is prepared, Foster Hall will be gratified indeed.

JOSIAH KIRBY LILLY

MY BROTHER STEPHEN

By Morrison Foster

• • •

The great popularity of "Old Folks at Home," "Uncle Ned," "Old Kentucky Home," "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming," and a hundred and sixty other American songs by the same author, produces a natural desire to know more of his personality and his history. I am prompted to publish this work by the numerous inquiries, increasing yearly, from all parts of the world, received by me, for information in regard to the life and music of my brother, Stephen C. Foster.

A stranger meeting him for the first time would have observed nothing striking in his appearance, but an acquaintance and a few moments' observation of and conversation with him would satisfy him that he was in the presence of a man of genius who, however modest in his demeanor, was accustomed to look deep into the thoughts and motives of men.

In person he was slender, in height not over five feet seven inches. His figure was handsome; exceedingly well proportioned. His feet were small, as were his hands, which were soft and delicate. His head was large and well proportioned. The features of his face were regular and striking. His nose was straight, inclined to aquiline; his nostrils full and dilated. His mouth was regular in form and the lips full. His most remarkable feature were his eyes. They were very dark and very large, and lit up with unusual intelligence. His hair was dark, nearly black. The color of his eyes and hair he inherited from his mother, some of whose remote ancestors were Italian, though she was directly of English descent. In conversation he was very interesting, but more suggestive than argumentative. He was an excellent listener, though well informed on every current topic.

His father, William Barclay Foster, was an enterprising, prominent citizen and merchant of Pittsburgh, Pa., of Scotch-Irish ancestry. Alexander Foster was the first of the family who came to America. He emigrated from Londonderry, Ireland, about the year 1728, and settled in Little Britain Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He had three sons and six daughters. The sons were James (the grandfather of Stephen C. Foster), William, and John. James, the eldest son, mar-

ried Ann Barclay and removed to Berkeley County, Virginia. He had three sons, James Barclay, Alexander, and William Barclay; also a number of daughters, all of whom married, and some of whom removed to Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio. William Barclay Foster was born in Berkeley County, Virginia, September 7, 1779. Through his mother's family (the Barclays) he was a cousin of Judge John Rowan, of Bardstown, Ky.; one of the first United States Senators from Kentucky. James Foster served his country through the Revolutionary war in the Virginia line, and was present at the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. About 1782, he with his family and a number of other Scotch-Irish people removed to Western Pennsylvania and settled near Canonsburg, Washington County, about nineteen miles from Pittsburgh. He was one of the original Trustees of Canonsburg Academy, founded in 1791, the first outpost of learning west of the Allegheny Mountains, and since renowned as Jefferson College.

William Foster, the second son of Alexander, became a distinguished and patriotic minister of the Presbyterian Church, and pastor of the congregations of Octorara and Doe Run. During the Revolution his speeches were so offensive to the British Government that General Howe sent a troop of horsemen to arrest him, but

the attempt failed. He died in the neighborhood where he had always lived.

John, the third son of Alexander, emigrated to North Carolina. From thence his descendants removed to Tennessee, where some of them became distinguished at the bar and in the councils of the State.

William Barclay Foster, the father of Stephen, went at the age of sixteen to Pittsburgh and entered into business in the employ of Anthony Beelen and Major Ebenezer Denny, who were engaged in extensive general merchandising. Afterwards he was admitted to partnership with Major Denny, and attended to the active part of the business. It was their custom at that time, the beginning of this century, to load flatboats with the products of the neighboring country, furs, peltries, whiskey, flour, etc., and float them down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans, where the goods were sold for money or exchanged for sugar, coffee, etc. Mr. Foster went on these expeditions about twice a year. Sometimes he returned by land via Natchez, Nashville, Maysville and Wheeling to Pittsburgh, traveling with large parties strongly armed, for the Indians were hostile and dangerous. At other times he took ship and sailed to New York. On one of these voyages the vessel he was on was captured by pirates off

the coast of Cuba, but was rescued by a Spanish man-of-war. At New York and Philadelphia he bought goods for the store at Pittsburgh.

These goods were transported across the mountains on the backs of horses in the earlier years of the business. Afterwards large wagons were used, drawn by six horses. On each horse (except the one on which the driver sat) a string of bells, attached to a bow above his collar, "discoursed most eloquent music" as the long line of wagons traversed the still forests of the mountains. The wagons were of the pattern used by the farmers east of the mountains, and were called Conestoga wagons.

It was on one of these business trips that he met the lady who became his wife, the mother of Stephen C. Foster, Miss Eliza Clayland Tomlinson. She was at the time visiting her aunt in Philadelphia, Mrs. Oliver Evans, the wife of the great American inventor. Mr. Evans lived on Race street. He built his wonderful amphibious locomotive at the time my mother was there. She related to me how she saw him walk with great pride beside it as it moved out of his yard into the street and down into the river.

The maternal ancestors of my mother, the Claylands, came from England, and settled on the eastern shore of

Maryland, in the early days of the colony. Her people were very loyal to the patriot cause, and many of them, Col. James Clayland and others, distinguished themselves in the battles of the Revolution. They were generally accomplished, both men and women, highly educated and refined. It is believed that much of the musical and poetic genius of my brother Stephen was derived from this branch of his family. The ladies were distinguished in Baltimore society for their musical and artistic ability.

II

WHILST I was burning a lot of old letters in 1855, after the death of our mother and father, the following was rescued from the flames just as its corners were beginning to be scorched. It is a letter from my mother to my father, written while on a visit to her relatives in Maryland:

BALTIMORE, MARCH 11, 1841.

DEAR HUSBAND:—I received your letter of the 6th last evening whilst sitting in Mrs. Gwin's parlour, on Charles street, in company with herself and two daughters, one very pretty. Mr. Gwin has been dead for five years, and with all her past beauty, Mrs. Gwin is not looking well. She has one son, a spoiled chap, studying law and not yet admitted to practice. Thomas Tilden has a very handsome appointment in the Post Office Department. John Blake has also received an appointment, but I cannot describe it. I was at his house yesterday. He looks badly, having lost one of his eyes, but he is as merry as ever and would hug and kiss me in the presence of his wife and daughters. Mr. Jacobs, at whose house I had spent the previous evening, was gallanting me. On Monday, Miss Tilden (the daughter of Charles Tilden) and myself started to Eutaw street, where Blakes, Beaches, Jacobs', Emorys and a host of Eastern Shore friends and relatives reside. We were invited to Mrs. Beach's, where we spent the night and the next day. Mr. Beach is now in bad health. Mrs. Beach is about my size. She has a very pretty daughter who plays and sings charmingly to the piano. Mr. Beach and I had quite a time making out the

chronicles of the Clayland family. We were all delving into it like one trying to find perpetual motion.

Robert Wright (Mrs. Beach's son by her first husand, Gustavus Wright, a man of great wealth, formerly of Rio Janeiro) says he will be here this summer; that they must have things in train to identify the descendants of Thomas Clayland and Susannah Seth, for he has made up his mind to go to England and inquire out the story. It seems that Lord Gage came to New York, and learning that Mrs. Kemble was a Miss Seth, told her that there was an ancient West Riding castleated estate on the borders of Durham, the lawful heirs to which were somewhere in America. The last rightful owner or occupant was an ancient maiden lady, whose only sister died in Queen Anne County, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. This sister had fled from her family with William Seth.

It seems by her papers that there was no communication with her family until her father and mother were dead, at which time she wrote that her only daughter, Susannah Seth, had married Thomas Clayland, and begged that her offspring should be thought of when she should be no more. The maiden lady above mentioned having died, the friend in whose possession these letters are and to whom they were written, sent an agent to inquire after the descendants of Thomas Clayland. * * *

With much affection, your wife,

Eliza Clayland Foster.

My mother was born in January, 1788, in Wilmington, Del., where her father, Joseph Tomlinson, was living at that time. My father and she were married at Chambersburg, Pa., where she had relatives, in 1807, by the Rev. David Denny, a Presbyterian minister.

They departed from Chambersburg and crossed the mountains on horseback to their home in Pittsburgh, a distance of nearly three hundred miles.

The following is an extract from the reminiscences of my mother, written for the edification and information of her children:

"The journey was slow and monotonous, and it was not until the fourteenth day that I hailed with delight the dingy town of Pittsburgh, my future home, where every joy and every sorrow of my heart since that bright period have been associated with the joys and sorrows of its people. It was evening when, weary and faint with travel, I was conducted, or, rather, borne, into the hospitable mansion of my husband's partner, the benevolent Major Denny, a dwelling in the center of the town, where I was received and treated with the most extreme kindness. After resting and changing my apparel I was shown into an apartment below stairs where blazed in all its brilliancy a coal fire, casting its light upon the face of beauty clothed in innocence in the person of little Nancy Denny, at that time five years old. The well-cleaned grating of the chimney-place, the light that blazed brightly from the fire, the vermilion hearth, the plain, rich furniture, the polished stand with lighted candles in candlesticks resembling burnished gold, made an evening scene that fell gratefully on my pleased sight. Upon a sofa lay the tall and military figure of the Major, a gentleman of the old school, easy and dignified in his bearing, a soldier who had served his country well under Washington at Yorktown, and Harmar, St. Clair and Wayne in the subsequent Indian campaigns."

It must be borne in mind that Pittsburgh, ever since the Revolutionary war, has always been a town of refinement, with a society fit to mingle in the courts of royalty. Before it was safe to live altogether outside of forts, while log dwellings were the homes of the people, while the sound of the pioneer's axe and rifle were familiar every day to the ear, academies and colleges were reared in the midst of the forest. Many officers of the army, with their accomplished families, settled here during and just after the Revolution. Among these were: Col. John Neville, Col. Pressley Neville, Col. William Butler, Col. Richard Butler, Lieut.-Col. Stephen Bayard, Major Isaac Craig, Major Ebenezer Denny, Major Edward Butler, Major Alexander Fowler, Major William Anderson, Capt. Abraham Kirkpatrick, Capt. Adamson Tannehill, Capt. Uriah Springer, Capt. George McCully, Capt. Nathaniel Irish, Capt. John Irwin, Capt. Joseph Asheton, Capt. James Gordon Heron, Capt. James O'Hara, afterwards Quartermaster-General; Col. George Morgan, Lieut. Josiah Tannehill, Lieut. William McMillan, Lieut. Gabriel Peterson, James Foster, Lieut. Ward, Capt. John Wilkins, Surgeon's Mate John Wilkins, Jr., Surgeon's Mate George Stevenson, Surgeon's Mate John McDowell, Quartermaster John Ormsby. These, and others who

were civilians, brought with them the courtesy and social amenities of the most refined circles in the East, which, in the Colonial times, were an improvement upon those of the nobility of England and France. A number of families had their private carriages and liveried servants. When Louis Philippe and his brothers, Beaujolais and Montpensier, visited Pittsburgh they expressed surprise at the ease and elegance of their entertainment by the people.

My father was a man of great public spirit and unbounded patriotism. During the War of 1812 he was appointed Quartermaster and Commissary of the U. S. Army. When the Army of the Northwest appealed to the Government for supplies to enable them to continue the contest, the answer was "a mournful echo from the vaults of an exhausted treasury." But my father with his own money and upon his own personal credit procured the necessary supplies. When the British army, which had captured Washington and burned the Capitol, turned their vessels' prows southward for the capture of New Orleans, urgent orders came to Pittsburgh to send forward clothing, blankets, guns and ammunition to the relief of Jackson's army. But no money was sent with which to purchase them. Again my father extended his generous hand and himself procured the

much-needed supplies. He loaded the steamboat Enterprise (the fourth steamboat which ever turned a wheel on the Western rivers) and dispatched her from Pittsburgh on the 15th of December, 1814. She was commanded by Capt. Henry M. Shreve, the pioneer boatman. Brave Shreve left Pittsburgh about dark of a winter night, and as the boat rounded to and straightened herself for the voyage, he called to my father on the wharf, "I'll get there before the British or sink this boat." He pushed on through the wilderness, amid the storm and the floating ice, and reached New Orleans on the 5th day of January, 1815, three days before the battle which saved Louisiana. Captain Shreve unloaded part of his cargo at the city and ran down the river, passing the British batteries, to Fort Philip, returned again, and was engaged in the battle of the 8th of January, serving at the sixth gun of the American batteries.

During this time the Government was often indebted to my father as much as fifty thousand dollars. Upon final adjudication of his accounts it became necessary to refer the facts as to certain amounts to a jury. Upon the hearing of the cause in the United States Court at Pittsburgh in 1823, the venerable Judge Walker (father of Hon. Robert J. Walker), in his charge to the jury, used these memorable words:

"Terminate as this cause may, Mr. Foster has established for himself a character for zeal, patriotism, generosity and fidelity which cannot be forgotten, and has placed a laurel on his brow that will never fade."

The jury without leaving the Court returned a verdict in favor of my father. That judgment still stands unpaid on the records of the United States Court at Pittsburgh. In 1814 my father established his residence upon a tract of land belonging to him on the Allegheny river, two and one-half miles above Pittsburgh. Here he built a beautiful white cottage on Bullitt's Hill, a height commanding a view up and down the river for miles. It was on this same piece of land that George Washington was cast on the night of December 28, 1753, and nearly frozen, when he and his guide, Christopher Gist, were returning from Fort Venango. My father sold thirty acres of this tract to the Government, on which now stands the United States Arsenal. He also laid out a town there and called it Lawrenceville in honor of Capt. James Lawrence, who was killed while gallantly fighting his ship, the Chesapeake, and whose last words, as he was carried below, were, "Don't give up the ship."

He donated a piece of ground in the town of Lawrenceville to be, as he expressed it, "a burial ground for our soldiers forever," where they might be buried by right,

and not by sufferance. At the time this donation was made, soldiers were passing through Pittsburgh continually, going to or returning from the front of war. Many of them died here and there was no place to bury them except in a potter's field. My father, being himself the son of an American soldier, determined that this should no longer be the case. A beautiful monument has been erected on this ground. It is of solid granite. The inscription on one side is:

"In honor of the American soldiers who lie buried here."
"We will emulate their patriotism and protect their remains."

On the other side is the inscription:

"This ground was given in 1814 by Col. William B. Foster, the founder of Lawrenceville, as a burial ground for our soldiers."

At the white cottage, overlooking the village of Lawrenceville and the winding Allegheny, the family spent many happy years. Here hospitality and kindness prevailed. Being the only private residence outside of town in that neighborhood where open house was kept, its generous board was free to all comers at all times. Three handsome and accomplished daughters grew up and enlivened the house with music and intellectual enjoyment. The sons, guided by the example and gentle teachings

of a Christian mother, and actuated by the manly characteristics of a brave and generous father, were taught to be truthful, honorable and manly. The oldest daughter, Charlotte Susanna, was an accomplished musician and beautiful singer. The others, Ann Eliza and Henrietta, were also good performers and singers, both of them possessed of more than ordinary poetic fancy and literary ability. Charlotte died in Louisville, Ky., at the age of nineteen years, while on a visit to her relatives, the Rowans and Barclays. At the time of her death she was engaged to be married to Mr. Prather.

Ann Eliza married the Rev. Dr. Edward Y. Buchanan (brother of President Buchanan), and died in Philadelphia at nearly eighty years of age. Henrietta married Mr. Thomas L. Wick, and after his death Major Thornton, Commissary U. S. A., and died in Germantown (Philadelphia) at the age of seventy years.

III

It was in such a home and amid such surroundings that Stephen C. Foster was born at the white cottage, Lawrenceville, on the 4th day of July, 1826. He was the youngest of the family except one (James, who died in infancy). The day was a memorable one for several reasons. Independence had reached its half-century. A grand celebration was held in my father's woods back of the house, on General Forbes' old road. The volunteer soldiers from Pittsburgh and the Regulars from the U. S. Arsenal were there. It was a "Bowery dinner," as they called it in those days. At one end of the table sat my father, and at the other, the stanch old editor of the *Pittsburgh Mercury*, Hon. John M. Snowden.

At noon a national salute pealed from the cannon at the Arsenal, and the bands played the national hymn. At that hour my brother Stephen was born. The same day Thomas Jefferson and John Adams died. When Stephen was quite young my father, having served several terms in the Legislature for the purpose of procuring the passage of the bills for the construction of the great Pennsylvania Canal, was appointed the first collector of tolls at Pittsburgh. He removed to Allegheny town, op-

posite Pittsburgh, where Stephen spent the most of his life. At an early age he was sent to a school founded by the Rev. Joseph Stockton, an old friend of my father, who had known him intimately at Meadville, Pa., and who was largely instrumental in inducing him to come to Allegheny town. Mr. Stockton was pastor of the First Presbyterian church of Allegheny and principal of the Allegheny Academy. This academy was a model institution for the education of youth, and was attended by the sons of nearly all the most prominent citizens of Pittsburgh and Allegheny. Mr. Stockton was a perfect tutor. He was learned, he was firm, he was amiable, and he was thorough and practical. His acquirements were numerous and general. In addition to the classics, he was master of the grammar of the English language, and was also a profound mathematician. He published a work on Arithmetic, which was for a long time the standard in all schools west of the Allegheny mountains, and today is unsurpassed by any later work.

Mr. Stockton had with him an assistant who was his equal as a scholar except in knowledge of the classics, Mr. John Kelly, an Irishman, of wonderful accomplishments. He had been a tutor in the family of Sir Rowland Hill, and brought with him letters of introduction from people of the most excellent sort in the refined city

of Dublin. Mr. Kelly was a thorough disciplinarian. While he was of genial disposition and out of school played ball and prisoner's base with the boys, and excelled in every manly athletic exercise, in school he required rigid attention to business.

Elocution was also taught as a separate branch by Mr. Caldwell, who afterwards became a noted minister of the gospel; and penmanship by Mr. Egerton. It is not to be wondered at that boys who attended this academy became scholars. Many of them were afterwards famous at the bar and in the councils of the nation.

Stephen was not a very methodical student. He early developed erratic symptoms which ill accorded with the discipline of the school-room. The first experiment with him was made when he was about five years old. He was sent, along with the rest of us, to an infant school taught by Mrs. Harvey, an elderly lady, and her daughter, Mrs. Morgan. He was called up for his first lesson in the letters of the alphabet. He had not proceeded far in this mystery when his patience gave out, and with a yell like that of a Comanche Indian, he bounded bareheaded into the road, and never stopped running and yelling until he reached home, half a mile away.

He had a faculty of reaching far ahead and grasping the scope of a lesson without apparent effort, which

was remarkable and sometimes startling. He preferred to ramble among the woods and upon the hills by the three beautiful rivers of his home with his books and pencil, alone and thoughtful. Here the rustling of the leaves, the twitter of birds, the falling twigs and the rippling waters accorded harmoniously, and fell in grateful melody on his sensitive ear. He was always perfect in his recitations, however, and his shortcomings in discipline were pardoned by my mother and father, who appealed to his tutors for forbearance in his case.

When he was nine years old a thespian company was formed, composed of boys of neighbor families, Robinsons, Cuddys, Kellys and Fosters. The theatre was fitted up in a carriage house. All were stockholders except Stephen. He was regarded as a star performer, and was guaranteed a certain sum weekly. It was a very small sum, but it was sufficient to mark his superiority over the rest of the company. "Zip Coon," "Long-tailed Blue," "Coal-Black Rose" and "Jim Crow" were the only Ethiopian songs then known. His performance of these was so inimitable and true to nature that, child as he was, he was greeted with uproarious applause, and called back again and again every night the company gave an entertainment, which was three times a week.

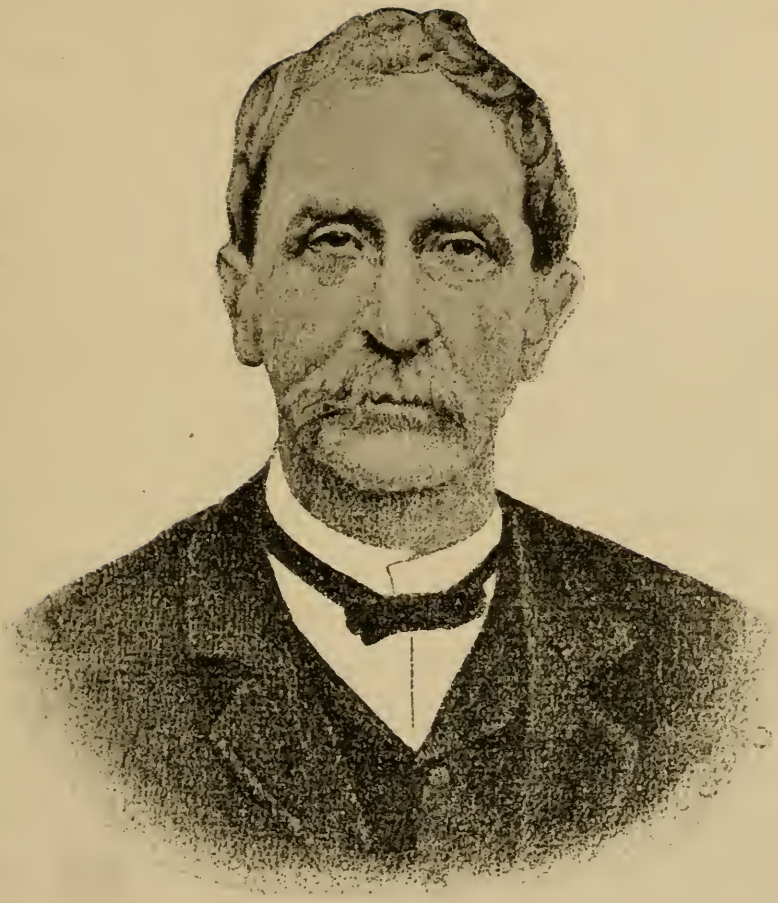
They generally cleared enough to enable the whole party to buy tickets to the old Pittsburgh Theatre on Saturday nights, where they could be seen in the pit listening to the acting of Junius Brutus Booth, Augustus A. Addams, Edwin Forrest, Oxley, Conner, Logan, Proctor, William and John Sefton, Mrs. Drake and Mrs. Duff.

After the death of Mr. Stockton the Academy in Allegheny was continued by Mr. Kelly, and the same thorough system of education was kept up. Lindley Murray was the standard authority on grammar, and the "English Reader" by the same author was used for instruction in reading. Walker's dictionary was the recognized lexicon. Hutton's Mathematics and the Western Calculator were relied on for arithmetic. These constituted the sources of primary education for the youth of Western Pennsylvania sixty-five years ago. Beyond them the Jefferson College at Canonsburg, Washington College at Washington, Pa., and the Western University at Pittsburgh afforded ample opportunities for treading the higher walks of learning. Education has always been regarded as of the greatest importance among the people of Western Pennsylvania, and nowhere in the world is the English language more generally correctly spoken than in that region.

After several years spent with Mr. Kelly, Stephen was placed under the care of Rev. Nathan Todd, a learned professor, who gave much attention to instruction in Latin and Greek, as well as in the English branches. Under the tutorship of Mr. Todd, Stephen made very satisfactory progress. Mr. Todd was not so rigid a disciplinarian as Mr. Kelly, but Stephen's conduct was always satisfactory. His sense of honor raised him above the meanness of taking advantage of leniency in his tutor. Mr. Todd remarked to my father that "Stephen was the most perfect gentleman he ever had for a pupil."

Stephen was very fond of our oldest brother William, whose business, as Chief Engineer of the Public Works (canals and railroads) of the State of Pennsylvania, kept him from home a great deal. William had a big, affectionate heart, and his little brother had many reasons for gratitude towards him for kind remembrances in the way of frequent presents and other tokens of affection. When he was about thirteen years old brother William proposed to take him with him to Towanda in Bradford County, where his headquarters were established at that time, and there being a good school near by (the academy at Athens), he stated that Stephen might go to school there if he wished. With the assent

of our parents the offer was accepted. It was winter, and William drove him all the way to Towanda in his own sleigh, drawn by two horses. The distance traveled was over three hundred miles, but the sleighing was good, and, of course, it was a jolly journey for the little boy, especially as brother William was a man of great personal popularity, and had many friends and acquaintances everywhere along the road. Ten years after that time brother William, John Edgar Thomson and Edward Miller were the engineers who built the great Pennsylvania Railroad. At the time of his death William was Vice-President of the company, and Mr. Thomson the President. Here "grateful memory" requires a tribute of affection to good brother William. With a heart as "tender and true" as the Douglas and as brave, he was a dutiful, loving son, and a generous, affectionate brother. He was a Christian firm in his devotion to his Redeemer, and his life's pathway was blazed with the marks of his goodness. Always devoted to duty, he put on the harness of industry and usefulness at the age of sixteen years, and wore it continuously to the day of his death. He was honored in many ways by the people of his native State, and now the last survivor of his family is proud to write of him—he was an honor to his State and to his friends.



MORRISON FOSTER

Sketch by Joseph Muller

Long before this time Stephen had displayed some wonderful instances of precocity in musical attainments.

Sister Ann Eliza had a number of musical instruments, among the rest a guitar. When he was two years old he would lay this guitar on the floor and pick out harmonies from its strings. He called it his "ittly pizani" (little piano).

At the age of seven years he accidentally took up a flageolet in the music store of Smith & Mellor, in Pittsburgh, and in a few minutes he had so mastered its stops and sounds that he played Hail Columbia in perfect time and accent. He had never before handled either a flageolet or flute.

It was not long after this that he learned, unaided, to play beautifully on the flute. He had the faculty of bringing those deep resonant tones from the flute which distinguish the natural flutist from the mechanical performer. Later he learned to play remarkably well on the piano. He had but few teachers. Henry Kleber, of Pittsburgh, was one of them. Stephen, however, needed only elementary instruction, for his rapid brain and quick perception scorned the slow progress by the beaten path, and he leaped forward to a comprehension of the whole scope of the instrument by the force of his great musical genius.

But he was not content to rely on inspiration alone for his guidance in music. He studied deeply, and burned much midnight oil over the works of the masters, especially Mozart, Beethoven and Weber. They were his delight, and he struggled for years and sounded the profoundest depths of musical science. The simple melodies which he gave to the public were not the accidental rays from an uncultured brain, but were the result of the most thorough and laborious analyses of harmonies, and when he completed them and launched them on the world, he knew they would strike favorably the ear of the most critical as well as the unlearned in music.

It was while at Athens that he first gave publicity to an effort at composition. He wrote a piece of music for the college commencement, and arranged it for four flutes. He took himself the leading part, and three others of the students the remaining ones. He called it the Tioga Waltz. Its performance was very satisfactory to the audience, and was rewarded with much applause and an encore. It has never previously been published, and is only now reproduced from my memory, where it has lain for fifty years.

After about a year spent at Athens he returned to his home in Allegheny, and afterwards entered Jefferson College at Canonsburg. During this part of his life

he studied French and German, and became proficient in both under the instruction of Capt. Jean Herbst, a Belgian gentleman, who came to reside in Pittsburgh.

Stephen also became quite a creditable artist in water colors as an amusement, and some of his pictures are yet preserved with pride by his friends.

IV

At sixteen years of age he produced his first published song. It was called "Open Thy Lattice, Love." The music only was his. It was published by George Willig, of Baltimore. During these years he was pursuing his studies in practical lines, and had no thought of devoting his time to musical composition and writing of poetry, as afterwards proved to be his destiny.

In 1845 a club of young men, friends of his, met twice a week at our house to practice songs in harmony under his leadership. They were, J. Cust Blair, Andrew L. Robinson, J. Harvey Davis, Robert P. McDowell, and myself. At that time negro melodies were very popular. After we had sung over and over again all the songs then in favor, he proposed that he would try and make some for us himself. His first effort was called "The Louisiana Belle." A week after this he produced the famous song of "Old Uncle Ned." "Uncle Ned" immediately became known and popular everywhere. Both the words and melody are remarkable. At the time he wrote "His Fingers Were Long Like de Cane in de Brake," he had never seen a canebrake, nor even been below the mouth of the Ohio river, but the appropriate-

ness of the simile instantly strikes everyone who has traveled down the Mississippi.

The next year Stephen went to Cincinnati at the solicitation of his brother Dunning, who was in business there, and acted as bookkeeper for him. He was a beautiful accountant, and his books kept at that time are models of neatness and accuracy. While in Cincinnati he wrote "Oh, Susanna," a song which soon became famous. There was then in Cincinnati in the music business, W. C. Peters, whom Stephen had known in Pittsburgh, and who had taught music in our family. Stephen had no idea at this time of deriving any emolument from his musical compositions, so he made a present of "Old Uncle Ned" and "Oh, Susanna" to Mr. Peters. The latter made ten thousand dollars out of them, and established a music publishing house which became the largest in the West. The fame of these two songs went around the world, and thousands sang and played them who never heard the name of the author or knew whence they came. In these two songs Stephen showed his intuitive knowledge of negro melody and pathos. He founded a new era in melody and ballad. The grotesque and clownish aspect of negro songs was softened, and ridicule began to merge into sympathy. Unknown to himself, he opened the way to the hearts of

the people, which led to actual interest in the black man. His sympathies were, however, always with the lowly and the poor. Once on a stormy winter night a little girl, sent on an errand, was run over by a dray and killed. She had her head and face covered by a shawl to keep off the peltings of the storm, and in crossing the street she ran under the horse's feet. Stephen was dressed and about going to an evening party when he learned of the tragedy. He went immediately to the house of the little girl's father, who was a poor working man and a neighbor whom he esteemed. He gave up all thought of going to the party and remained all night with the dead child and her afflicted parents, endeavoring to afford the latter what comfort he could.

It was difficult to get him to go into society at all. He had a great aversion to its shams and glitter, and preferred the realities of his home and the quiet of his study. When he was eighteen years old, a lady who was an old friend of the family, gave a large party, and invited us all, and added, "tell Stephen to bring his flute with him." That settled it so far as he was concerned. He would not go a step. He said, "tell Mrs. ——— I will send my flute if she desires it." This dislike to being classed as a mere performer characterized him during his whole life, though he was not at all unsocial and

willingly sang or played for the enjoyment of himself or others, if the occasions were spontaneous and not set up. He, however, often sang in chorus with others, upon occasions of concerts for charitable purposes, in Pittsburgh.

While he was in Cincinnati, in 1847, he sent to me at my suggestion a song called "Way Down South Whar de Corn Grows," to be entered for a prize at an exhibition in Pittsburgh. The audience gave the applause and the approval to Stephen's song, but the prize, as usual, went to one of the troupe, for a vulgar plagiarism without any music or poetry in it. The next day, whilst I was in the United States Court taking out a copyright for Stephen's song, one of the troupe who had sung it appeared and asked for a copyright in his own name for the very same song. I informed Judge Irwin of the fraud, and the baffled rogue was glad to be allowed to depart unpunished.

Matters of this kind gave Stephen no concern, however. He was always indifferent about money or fame. It was perhaps fortunate for him that he had several older brothers, who, being practical business men, advised him in matters which he would not have realized the importance of.

After his return from Cincinnati in 1848, he devoted

himself to the study of music as a science and also perfected his knowledge of languages and other branches of learning. He had found one thing; that he had no taste for a business life. About this time he wrote the music and words of "Nelly Was a Lady," which was published by Firth, Pond & Co. of New York. Offers began to come to him for his compositions, which were being sung and sought for all over the world.

While, as I said before, he never aspired to greatness as a performer, his voice was a true and pleasing baritone, sonorous and sympathetic. When he sang his own songs, which he did to a perfection no one else could attain, there was a plaintive sweetness in his tone and accent which sometimes drew tears from listeners' eyes.

He would sit at home in the evening at the piano and improvise by the hour beautiful strains and harmonies which he did not preserve, but let them float away like fragrant flowers cast upon the flowing water. Occasionally he would vary his occupation by singing in plaintive tones one of his own or other favorite songs. Of the latter class he much admired the "May Queen" of Tennyson, and the music as composed by Mr. Dempster. His rendering of the verse "Tonight I saw the sun set, he set and left behind," etc., was truly pathetic. At times tears could be seen on his cheeks as he sang this song, so sen-

sitive was his nature to the influence of true poetry combined with music. I usually sat near him on these occasions and listened quietly with profound delight. Sometimes he would whirl round on the piano stool and converse a few moments with me, then resume his improvisations and his singing. Through the long years of the past those pleasing sounds, and the recollection of those "evenings at home," still linger gratefully in my memory.

And yet this sensitive man had the nerve and courage of a lion physically. From earliest childhood he was noted for his courage, coolness and skill in the combats which continually occur among boys of the same town. As he grew up, no odds ever seemed to awe him. He was known as one who must be let alone, and was held in high respect accordingly.

One night as he was returning home from Pittsburgh to Allegheny, he found at the end of the bridge two brutes abusing and beating a drunken man. He of course interfered, and fought them both, rough and tumble, all over the street. He managed to pick up a piece of a board in the scramble, with which he beat one almost senseless and chased the other ingloriously from the field. A knife wound on the cheek, received in the encounter, left a scar which went with him to his grave.

He had certain favorites among his neighbors and friends whom he preferred to have assist him in singing the choruses of his songs while they were in course of preparation. Those he chose because of the excellence of their voices and correct method of singing.

Among them Mrs. Andrew L. Robinson, Mrs. John Mitchell and Miss Jessie Lightner were the most conspicuous. For these reasons, Miss Sophie Marshall, afterwards Mrs. Harry Miller, was a favorite whilst he resided in Cincinnati. He was exceedingly exact in rehearsal, and these ladies understood his methods better than any others.

He always (with very rare exceptions) wrote the words as well as the music of his songs. He said the difficulty of harmonizing sounds with words rendered this necessary, though he would have often gladly dispensed with the writing of the words if he could.

He delighted in playing accompaniments on the flute to the singing and playing on the piano of his sister or one of his lady friends.

These little concerts were very delightful and gave the greatest pleasure to the household. As the song went on he would improvise, without the slightest hesitation or difficulty, the most beautiful variations upon its musical theme.

While in Cincinnati he met Miss Sophie Marshall, the grand-daughter of Michael P. Cassilly of that city, a former Pittsburgher, who was an old friend of our family. Miss Marshall possessed a beautiful soprano voice and sang with much sweetness and taste. She was a great favorite in society. For her he wrote, "Stay, Summer Breath," which was among his earliest sentimental productions.

While so many of his best songs are what are called Plantation Melodies, he had no preference for that style of composition. His poetic fancy ran rather to sentimental songs. Many of these gained great popularity and sold in immense numbers—and, indeed, continue to sell largely at the present time—such as "Gentle Anne," "Laura Lee," "Willie, We Have Missed You," "Ellen Bayne," "Old Dog Tray," "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming," "Ah, May the Red Rose Live Alway," etc. Melodies appeared to dance through his brain continually. Often at night he would get out of bed, light a candle and jot down some notes of a melody on a piece of paper, then retire again to bed and to sleep.

Firth, Pond & Co., of New York, were the first to make a regular arrangement with him for publishing his music, paying him a royalty of three cents for each copy printed.

F. D. Benteen, of Baltimore, also made a contract with him of the same nature. Both of these contracts proved mutually satisfactory and profitable to all parties.

He now gave his whole attention to either the study or composition of music. He located himself in a back room at the top of the house, and while in there he locked the door to every one but his mother.

He was very simple in his tastes, and no matter how well his income justified it, he shrank from everything like display. The simplest forms of food satisfied him. Indeed, he never appeared to care what was set before him on the table. If it appeased hunger it was all he cared for. His companions were seldom ever musicians. Outside of his own studies and performances he seemed to prefer to get away from music and musical topics. But he was very fond of the society of cultured people and men of genius in walks entirely different from his own.

In 1850 he was married to Miss Jane Denny McDowell, daughter of Dr. Andrew N. McDowell, one of the leading physicians of Pittsburgh. Dr. McDowell was the grandson of Professor McDowell, who was, in 1799, President of the College at Annapolis, Md. A letter from George Washington, addressed in that year to

Professor McDowell, must be among the last letters written by the great man. In it Washington says:

"Consequent of a letter I have received from Mr. Stuart I have been induced to confide to your care the young gentleman who will deliver this letter (George Washington Parke Custis). You will find him intelligent, truthful and moral, and I have reason to hope he will live to justify the best expectations of his friends, and to be useful in the councils of his country."

After his marriage, Stephen received very flattering offers from the publishers in New York, and strong inducements to make that city his home. He removed there and had every favorable prospect that a young man could hope for. He was paid a certain sum for every song he might choose to write, besides a royalty on the copies printed.

He went to house-keeping and liked New York very much. But after a year the old fondness for home and mother began to be too strong for him to overcome. One day he suddenly proposed to his wife that they return to Pittsburgh. He brought a dealer to the house, sold out everything in the way of furniture, and within twenty-four hours was on the road to the home of his father in Allegheny. He arrived late at night and was not expected. When he rang the bell his mother was awakened and knew his footsteps on the porch. She rose

immediately and went down herself to let him in. As she passed through the hall she called out, "Is that my dear son come back again?" Her voice so affected him that when she opened the door she found him sitting on the little porch-bench weeping like a child.

His love for his mother amounted to adoration. She was to him an angelic creature. There is not one reference to mother in the homely words in which he clothed his ballads but came direct from his heart and symbolized his own feelings.

Ah, what a mother was that! Handsome, brilliant, and admired, she was the soul of purity, truth and Christian virtue. Her example shone upon her household as a continual light from heaven. No unkind word ever passed between any members of that family, for strife was repelled and anger washed away by the pure stream of love that emanated from her presence. Her precepts were listened to by her children with the reverence due to oracular utterances, and were never unheeded. Whilst she was a devout Christian, she had no method in her teachings, no rules for daily or hourly observance. An unquestioning faith in the Redeemer, and charity in all things, was her rule. She was very fond of entertaining her children with historical facts or recitations from the works of the best authors, which

her wonderfully retentive memory enabled her to draw on to any extent. Mother's room was the favorite spot to all the household. It was here that all assembled in the evenings, and, gathering round her chair or couch, would listen with rapt attention to her words of wisdom and instruction.

Her discourses abounded in illustrations of the goodness of God and the necessity for our recognizing the fact that dependence on Him alone constitutes the happiness of mankind. Sometimes she would say, almost abruptly, "And now, my children, kneel down here around me and let us pray to our heavenly Father."

And there on the floor around that blessed mother her children, old and young, threw themselves and listened to her beautiful, touching prayers in their behalf. Rising, her face resumed its sweet, sunny aspect, and everything went on as though it was the most natural thing in the world to fall down and worship God at any time. Her death, which occurred in January, 1855, created a void in the household which, as beautifully expressed in one of Stephen's songs, "could never be filled."

The following obituary, written by that accomplished lawyer and patriotic soldier, Col. Samuel W. Black, fittingly expresses the general sentiment:

"This respected and beloved lady was buried on Saturday. She died suddenly, without warning, but not unprepared. Being very merciful herself, she trusted faithfully in the mercy of her Redeemer. Mrs. Foster was uncommonly gifted, and endowed with excellent good sense and great refinement. Wisdom and sound judgment accompanied her all her life and sparkled every day with the brightness of extravagant genius. Her intellect is remembered with just admiration, but her life is cherished for her heart's sake. The little children of our two cities will long lament their lost friend. But the especial grief of this affliction is within her own house and home. There the wife who never faltered in the fondest exercise of her duty and devotion has quickened her eager step for the last time. By the bedside of him whom God has stricken, other eyes and hands must perform the ministration of love. The faithful servants that looked upon her as a mother rather than a mistress will sigh for another home like theirs with her. And her children, who have fulfilled by affectionate obedience the first commandment with promise, reciprocating love with love, will tell to one another at the fireside how vacant it looks because she is not there. Sacred to sorrow is the day of her death. 'She stretched out her hand to the poor; yea, she reached forth her hands to the needy. Her children arise up and call her blessed.' "

Stephen never went away from home to stay, again, as long as his mother and father lived. The latter was an invalid, and was confined to his room for four years before his death, which took place July 27, 1855. Stephen was attentive and devoted to his sick father as long as the latter lived. The sentiment of the poetry in the song of "Massa's in de Cold Ground" expresses his own experience and feelings.

V

One day in 1851, Stephen came into my office, on the bank of the Monongahela, Pittsburgh, and said to me, "What is a good name of two syllables for a Southern river? I want to use it in this new song of 'Old Folks at Home.'" I asked him how Yazoo would do. "Oh," said he, "that has been used before." I then suggested Pedee. "Oh, pshaw," he replied, "I won't have that." I then took down an atlas from the top of my desk and opened the map of the United States. We both looked over it and my finger stopped at the "Swanee," a little river in Florida emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. "That's it, that's it exactly," exclaimed he delighted, as he wrote the name down; and the song was finished, commencing, "Way Down Upon de Swanee Ribber." He left the office, as was his custom, abruptly, without saying another word, and I resumed my work.

Just at that time he received a letter from E. P. Christy, of New York, who was conducting very popular Negro Melody Concerts, asking him if he would write a song for Christy which the latter might sing before it was published. Stephen showed me the letter and asked me what he should do. I said to him, "Don't let him do it unless he pays you."

At his request I drew up a form of agreement for Christy to sign, stipulating to pay Stephen five hundred dollars for the privilege he asked. This was forwarded to Christy and return mail brought it back duly signed by the latter. The song sent happened to be the "Old Folks at Home." It was in this manner that Christy's name came to appear on the first edition of the "Old Folks at Home." Stephen sent the manuscript to his publishers, Firth, Pond & Co., who paid him and his heirs the royalty. The publishers furnished Christy an advance copy of the song before publication.

An old friend of ours, Col. Matthew I. Stewart, gave Stephen a handsome setter dog, which for a long time was his constant companion. We lived upon the East Common of Allegheny, a wide open space, now improved into a beautiful park. Stephen often watched this dog with much pleasure, playing with the children on the Common. When he wrote of "Old Dog Tray," he put into verse and song the sentiments elicited by remembrances of this faithful dog.

He was easily disturbed from sleep at night and used every precaution to be as quiet as possible. A strange dog got into one of the back buildings and howled at intervals. Stephen finally could endure it no longer, and sallying forth partly dressed, with a poker in his

hand, he pounded the poor dog away from the neighborhood. The family had a good laugh at the author of "Old Dog Tray" the next day.

On another occasion he had bought a small clock, run by springs, and set it on the mantelpiece of his chamber. The thing had a very loud tick, and there was no way of stopping it after it was once wound up. He could not get to sleep, for the clock, with its monotonous clang, drove slumber away. He wrapped a blanket around it, and shut it up in a bureau drawer. But the dull throbbing sound which reached his ears from that retreat was, as he said, worse than the loud, open, defiant tick from the mantelpiece. He then lit a candle, and took it down to the dining-room cupboard, but still he could hear it faintly. At length, in despair, he carried the ticking monster down to the cellar, in the profoundest depths of which he covered it with a washtub; and then, returning to his room, carefully closed every door behind him, and at last found rest.

When Stephen was a child, my father had a mulatto bound-girl named Olivia Pise, the illegitimate daughter of a West India Frenchman, who taught dancing to the upper circles of Pittsburgh society early in the present century. "Lieve," as she was called, was a devout Christian and a member of a church of shouting colored peo-

ple. The little boy was fond of their singing and boisterous devotions. She was permitted to often take Stephen to church with her. Here he stored up in his mind "many a gem of purest ray serene," drawn from these caves of negro melody. A number of strains heard there, and which, he said to me, were too good to be lost, have been preserved by him, short scraps of which were incorporated in two of his songs, "Hard Times Come Again No More" and "Oh, Boys, Carry Me 'Long."

When he was from ten to thirteen years old, he visited a great deal an old uncle, John Struthers, who had been a surveyor, hunter, and Indian fighter in the first settlement of the country, and who now, past eighty years old, was very fond of Stephen, and always pleased to welcome him to his log house in the Northwest territory. Old Uncle Struthers had dogs and rifles, and himself would lead the hunt at night for 'coons, opossums, and such like nocturnal game. It was tame work to the old pioneer, who had been used to bears, panthers and hostile Indians. These hunts and the stories of adventure told by his aged relative, of course gave great pleasure to Stephen, and kindled the flame of his vivid fancy. One cold day, he was missed from the house, and was hunted for everywhere outside. At last his uncle discovered him sitting up to his neck in a pile of chaff,

watching the movements of the chickens and other barnyard animals—"just thinking," as he briefly explained. The old gentleman always prophesied that Stephen, who even then displayed great originality and musical talent, would be something famous if he lived to be a man.

At the close of February, 1852, brother Dunning McNair Foster came to Pittsburgh with his steamboat, the James Millingar, to load a cargo for New Orleans. Stephen and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew L. Robinson, Miss Jesse Lightner, Mrs. William Robinson and her daughter, Miss Mary Ann, embarked with him on a pleasure trip to New Orleans. Miss Louisa Walker and her two brothers joined them at Cincinnati. There was a good deal of musical ability in the party, and they made the trip pleasant, not only for themselves, but for the other passengers as well.

On this voyage Stephen observed a good many incidents of Southern life, which he afterwards utilized as points for poetical simile in songs. On the return trip, brother Dunning found it would be more profitable to reship his freight and passengers at Cincinnati and return from there to New Orleans. They were transferred to Capt. Charles W. Batchelor's magnificent new boat, the peerless Allegheny, and arrived in Pittsburgh on

her. I had met them at Cincinnati, and we were so well treated on the Allegheny that everybody on the boat joined in a complimentary card of thanks to Captain Batchelor. In those days the captains and other officers of the steamboats on the Western rivers regarded the passengers as their guests, and treated them accordingly. These officers necessarily had to be gentlemen, or otherwise they could not continue long in the trade.

Wonderful men were those old-time river commanders. Combinations of shrewd business management, daring seamanship, physical courage, and manners fit for the most refined society. They are nearly all gone now. Before long the landing bell will sound and the gangplank be run out for the last of them to take his place "among the silent sleepers."

VI

During the period between 1853 and 1860 Stephen remained at home, and many of his sentimental songs were written, such as "Willie, We Have Missed You," "Gentle Annie," and others.

In 1860 he again received a profitable offer from Firth, Pond & Co., his publishers, and he went to New York, remaining there until his death. In January, 1864, while at the American Hotel, he was taken with an ague and fever. After two or three days he arose, and while washing himself he fainted and fell across the washbasin, which broke and cut a gash in his neck and face. He lay there insensible and bleeding until discovered by the chambermaid who was bringing the towels he had asked for to the room. She called for assistance and he was placed in bed again. On recovering his senses he asked that he be sent to a hospital. Accordingly he was taken to Bellevue Hospital. He was so much weakened by fever and loss of blood that he did not rally. On the 13th of January he died peacefully and quietly. Under request of his family his body was immediately taken to an undertaker's, by direction of Col. William A. Pond, and placed in an iron coffin. On arrival of his

brother, Henry Baldwin Foster, and myself, his remains were taken by us to Pittsburgh, accompanied by his wife. The Pennsylvania Railroad Company carried the party free of charge, and the Adams Express Company declined to receive pay for transporting his body.

On the 20th of January the funeral services were held in Trinity church, the rector, Rev. E. C. Swope, officiating. A special choir, under direction of his old friend, Henry Kleber, sang "Vital Spark of Heavenly Flame" and other beautiful selections. At the gate of the Allegheny Cemetery the funeral cortege was met by a volunteer band of the best musicians of Pittsburgh, who on the march and at the grave performed "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming," "Old Folks at Home," and other selections of his own music. He left one child, a daughter Marion, the wife of Mr. Walter Welsh.

His body lies beside the mother and father he loved so much and near the spot where he was born. His grave is marked by a simple marble tombstone, inscribed on which are the words:

STEPHEN C. FOSTER
OF PITTSBURGH
Born July 4, 1826
Died January 13, 1864

His monument is not grand but it is sufficient. His works will perpetuate his fame and story longer than

the chiseled or moulded art of man's hands could do it.

He was named after Stephen Collins, the young son of Thomas Collins, Esq., a leading member of the Pittsburgh bar. Mrs. Collins was a dear friend of my mother, and her only son Stephen had died at the age of twelve years, just before my brother Stephen was born.

In an article contributed to one of the leading magazines of the country, his old friend, Robert P. Nevin, wrote of him:

"In the true estimate of genius its achievements only approximate the highest standard of excellence as they are representative, or illustrative, of important truth. They are only great as they are good. If Mr. Foster's art embodied no higher idea than the vulgar notion of the negro—as a thing of tricks and antics—then it might have proved a tolerable catch-penny affair, and commanded an admiration among boys of various growths, until its novelty wore off. But the art in his hands teemed with a nobler significance. It dealt in its simplicity with universal sympathies and taught us all to feel with the colored man the lowly joys and sorrows it celebrated. May the time be far in the future ere lips will fail to move to its music, or hearts to respond to its influence, and may we who owe him so much, preserve gratefully the memory of the master,
STEPHEN COLLINS FOSTER."

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